

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON— The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom urges President Bush to make his trip to China for the opening of the Olympic Games a beacon of hope for millions of Chinese. The Commission calls on the president to speak publicly during his trip about the pressing need for China to guarantee universal human rights, including the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and to uphold the rule of law.

“Hopes that the Olympic Games would dramatically improve human rights conditions in China have not been realized,” Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer said at a press conference held Wednesday with the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. “Instead, the situation has grown increasingly dire, particularly for many of China’s religious adherents.”

Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns who peacefully protested against Chinese government rights violations, including the freedom of religion, this past spring remain in detention or are missing and unaccounted for. Almost 700 Protestant religious leaders who have not or cannot gain government registration have been detained in the past year. Over 30 Catholic bishops and priests remain in detention, including two priests arrested just this month. Security forces continue to repress Falun Gong and Uighur Muslim adherents, and scores of their religious leaders and followers continue to be detained for “illegal religious activities.”

The Chinese government is so intent on maintaining control over allegedly problematic religious communities that lawyers who take up the cases of persecuted religious leaders and journalists who report on their situation are jailed, beaten, and harassed.

Repressive measures targeting religious communities in China have a long history, but new measures, put in place to maintain so-called “social harmony” during the Olympics, raise the

prospect that China will continue to step up repression when the Games end.

“This is why it is so important for President Bush to take a strong and public stand now,” Gaer said.

The Commission has suggested specific actions for President Bush during his trip to China. These include:

1) giving a speech emphasizing religious freedom as a universal human right that would be broadcast live to the Chinese people;

2) urging the Chinese government to take several immediate, confidence-building measures to signal its commitment to guaranteeing the religious freedom of Tibetans by:

a) announcing an end to all “patriotic education” programs for Tibetan monks and nuns;

b) permitting a visit by independent, impartial experts to Geoden Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama’s chosen Panchen Lama, and repealing new laws requiring government approval of all lamas;

c) affirming that minors should be able to engage in religious education at any age;

d) announcing that devotion to the Dalai Lama, including the display and veneration of his picture, is not a criminal act;

e) unconditionally releasing all detained monks and nuns and providing an accounting for all persons taken into custody, killed or otherwise harmed during the protests this past spring; and

f) continuing direct negotiations between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government.

3) seeking the immediate release of members of Rebiya Kadeer’s family and an end to harassment of peaceful Uighur Muslim adherents;

4) seeking the release of the more than 30 “underground” Catholic Bishops and priests, including Bishop Su Zhimin;

5) meeting with leaders of an unregistered group or congregation and calling for an announcement that independent Protestants can legally register separately from government-approved Protestant organizations;

6) urging the Chinese government, as the Sudanese government’s major oil partner and arms supplier, to use its considerable leverage to end genocide and protect religious freedom in Sudan; and

7) urging the protection of North Korean refugees and calling for an end to forced repatriation.

“The Commission urges President Bush, who has a strong, personal commitment to the

issue of religious freedom in China, to convey his convictions to China's people as well as its leaders," Gaer said.